

Security Risks Report - Mexico

August 2022

Executive summary

- Security risk was extremely high in August across the North and North-West of Mexico as a result of waves of cartel-related violence throughout the month
- The violence was triggered by a mix of events, and can be broadly classified into two:
 - Destruction of property – mainly vehicular arson – by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), and violence against the security forces responding to the incidents
 - Destruction of property and homicide by los Mexicles in Ciudad Juarez, reportedly cascading from a brawl between prison inmates belonging to rival groups (los Mexicles and los Chapos); there were 11 fatalities
- Kidnap and extortion were not salient features of the violence
- In one instance the CJNG's attack was in response to the capture of 11 of its members who were holding an individual prisoner
- We have not been able to determine whether this person had been kidnapped for ransom or was being held for other reasons
- According to official data, reported instances of kidnap have been trending down in 2022, but reported incidents of extortion are on the rise



Monthly Review

August saw an eruption of street violence across several states in the North and North-West of Mexico that resulted in wholesale destruction of property and tens of fatalities among the local populations. The authorities have labelled the wave of violence as “narcoterrorism”, owing to the indiscriminate attacks perpetrated by the drug cartels against the civilian population.

Kidnap and extortion were not a salient feature of the violence, which was in all cases designed to send messages to opponents – whether they be rival cartels or the authorities. However, in one case the triggering event was the authorities’ rescue of an individual being held prisoner. We found no information to determine whether the victim had been kidnapped for ransom or was being held for other reasons.

The main incidents involving violence against civilians were reported as follows:

- After the authorities disrupted a summit meeting between leaders of the **CJNG**, on 9 August the cartel launched a wave of violence in the towns of Guadalajara (state of Jalisco) and Guanajato.
- On 11 August in a Ciudad Juárez penitentiary, a brawl between members of two gangs, **Los Chapos** and **Los Mexicles**, led to a broader assault by the latter on the civilian population in Ciudad Juárez. There were 11 reported fatalities: two prisoners and nine civilians.
- On 12 August in Baja California, over 30 vehicles were set on fire across the state in the towns of Tijuana, Ensenada, Rosarito, Tecate and Mexicali. There were no reported fatalities. The authorities have accused the **CJNG** of co-ordinating these attacks, although a few press reports have raised doubts about this owing to the later arrest of six individuals thought to be linked to the Sinaloa Cartel in connection with the violence.
- Over the last two weeks of August, the **CJNG** mounted attacks on the local population and the security forces across the state of Zacatecas, in response to an operation in which the authorities captured 11 members of the **CJNG** who were holding a victim prisoner.

Official reported crime statistics show kidnap trending down in January-July 2022, while extortion has been rising over that period. According to data from the Secretary General of the National Public Security System (SESNSP), reported instances of kidnap in July fell to a record low of 24, while there were 813 reports of extortion, an increase of nearly 6% year on year.

On 9 August a law enforcement operation in Mexico state rescued a kidnapped female victim and arrested six men. The authorities suspect that the six individuals may be linked or directly involved with a **CJNG**-affiliated cell that is responsible for a series of other kidnappings in the region.

An investigator from the Mexico State Prosecutor’s Office disappeared on 27 August in Tejupilco, a town some 165km South-West of Mexico City; he was reportedly found alive in early September. This was not a case of kidnap for ransom. The authorities suspect that the investigator was abducted by the **Familia Michoacana** in retaliation for a successful operation by the State Prosecutor’s Office against the cartel in July.

US State Department advice

There were no reports of US citizens caught up or harmed in the August attacks across Mexico, but the wave of violence prompted the US State Department to review its travel advisory.

As at September 2022, kidnapping was raised as a concern in the following states:





Organised crime in Mexico

Altogether, it is estimated that there are around 150 drug cartels of varying sizes operating across the country. Each cartel encompasses sub-groups, which can range in nature from significant paramilitary forces to small criminal street gangs. Periodically, one of these subgroups will gather enough strength to splinter off and eventually become a rival cartel, resulting in increasing levels of violence as the newcomer seeks to establish itself. At other times, fragmentation has been the result of successful government operations to capture a cartel's top leadership, making the war against drugs akin to fighting a hydra.

Key information

- The Mexican government considers the **Sinaloa Cartel** (also known as the Pacific Cartel) and the **Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG)** to be the dominant groups in the drug trade. Sinaloa broadly controls the North-West while CJNG is based in central Mexico. These two cartels are fighting a war for control of the states of Zacatecas and Baja California; the latter is also being contested by the **Tijuana Cartel**.
- The two leading cartels are also involved in other wars. CJNG is fighting **La Familia Michoacana** for Mexico State, as well as seeking to take over Guanajuato state from smaller local groups. Meanwhile, the Sinaloa Cartel is fighting the **Juárez Cartel** for control over Ciudad Juárez, a key transit point to the US.
- The Sinaloa Cartel is experiencing an internal power struggle between **la Chapiza** – led by the sons of former cartel head Joaquín Guzmán (“el Chapo”) – and **la Mayiza** – led by former Chapo lieutenant Ismael Zambada (“el Mayo”). With el Mayo on the threshold of retiring (he is said to be 74 years old), the struggle between the two factions will intensify over the coming years. Some local analysts believe that el Chapo's sons – collectively most often known as “los Chapitos” – want to pursue a more violent strategy than el Mayo, with less consideration for the civilian population. Consequently, if they prevail there is a risk that the incidence of kidnap, extortion and other violence may rise in the territories under the Sinaloa Cartel's control.
- The CJNG is also at risk of internal strife because its leader, Nemesio Oseguera (“el Mencho”), is said to be 56 years old and in poor health. The summit disrupted by the authorities in August was reportedly a meeting between leading candidates to discuss the succession.
- Increasing fragmentation among the cartels is in fact sparking many other rivalries and fuelling competition for control over territory. For example, the CJNG is waging wars with several other cartels seeking to establish control in Mexico State: some 15 groups reportedly operate in Mexico City.



Main groups in the news this month

In early September the authorities arrested one of the co-founders of the **CJNG**, an individual referred to as “Erick N”. Given the cartel's retaliation in August after the failed attempt to capture two of its leaders, there is fear that this arrest could presage another outbreak of violence.

There is contradictory information with respect to **los Mexicles**, reported instigators of the August violence against civilians in Ciudad Juarez. All sources concur that the group came together in the 1980s in the US Texas prison system. A group of Mexican nationals banded together to protect themselves against other inmates and were later deported en masse to Mexico. The authorities have said that they belong to La Línea, the enforcement unit of the Juárez Cartel, but other observers say that they are affiliated with the Sinaloa Cartel.

If the latter were to be the case, then the fight with **los Chapos** could be part of the Sinaloa Cartel's internal power struggles. Los Chapos – not to be confused with the actual sons of Joaquín Guzmán – appear to be another name for Gente Nueva, an enforcement arm of the Sinaloa Cartel.



Kidnapping and extortion



Perpetrators

- Drug cartels often perpetrate abductions of public officials, usually ending with the death of the victim. The intention is to challenge the authorities and demonstrate control over territory.
- Among the sub-groups within each cartel, kidnap for ransom is an established practice, together with extortion. The perpetrators are usually street gangs low down in the hierarchy of the cartel.



Targets

- Victims of kidnapping can be random individuals, but most often the targets are local small and medium entrepreneurs known to have the resources necessary to pay the ransom.
- Foreign individuals from developed countries are rarely deliberate targets of kidnapping, owing to the media attention these cases attract. An exception to this is express kidnapping (mainly in major urban centres), which involves forcing an individual to extract cash from an automated cash machine and affects victims more randomly.
- A separate social issue is specific kidnapping of women, linked to sexual assault or human trafficking. The targets are local women or immigrants from other Latin American states.

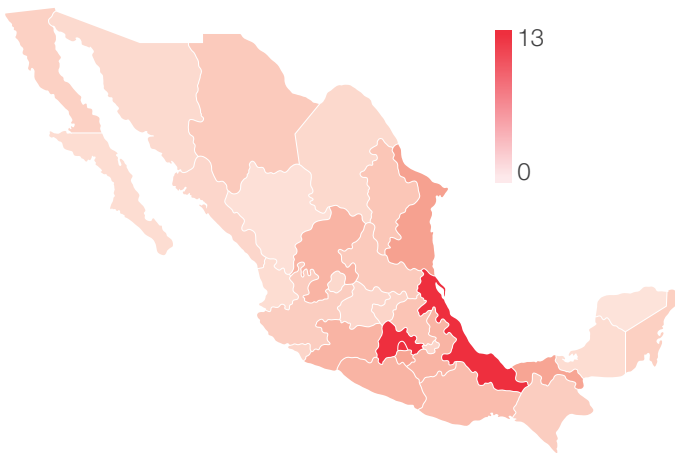


Statistics

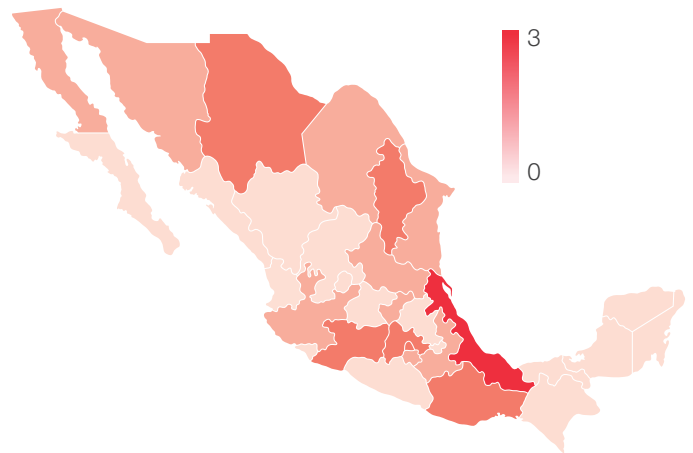
- Crime statistics in Mexico are highly unreliable owing to significant under-reporting; estimates suggest that only one in five kidnappings are reported to the authorities.

Kidnap

Five-year average



July 2022



Extortion

Five-year average



July 2022



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